



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

450 Columbus Blvd, Suite 701 | Hartford, Connecticut 06103 | 860.713.2500

Office of the Commissioner

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Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the invitation to discuss and review the Department of Agriculture's proposed budget revisions for Fiscal Year 2023. For the record, I am Bryan Hurlburt, the Commissioner of the department.

Governor Lamont's proposed budget adjustments for FY23 includes no new adjustments to our Personnel Services, and the only significant change from FY 22 is an adjustment of roughly \$62,000 in reductions to our Other Expenses line item. This reduction is due to the shift in IT functionality to the Department of Administrative Services for its Centralized Information Technology functions. The Seniors Farmer Nutrition, State WIC and Dairy Agriculture Sustainability programs all remain funded at their previously approved levels.

Currently, the Department of Agriculture has 52 employees, and we anticipate 12 retirements due to the upcoming retirement cliff in the coming year. Most of those retirements will impact our inspection and regulatory functions, which are critical to the health and safety of animals and humans in the state. We are working with our senior management team to identify critical needs, re-think some of the roles and functionality, and build in overlap with some positions to minimize the impact of these retirements. Our team works well with DAS HR on approving and processing positions in a timely manner.

Over the last year, the Department of Agriculture was able to secure and distribute significant support to agricultural industries to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, provide much needed relief for these small businesses, and support the emergency food system with CT Grown foods. The Department distributed over \$10 million in Corona Relief Funds and ARPA through the following efforts:

- \$3.635 Million to Dairy Sector
- \$3.25 Million to Aquaculture Sector
- \$2.45 Million to CT Foodshare to support their drive through distribution programs and specifically to purchase CT Grown food products
- \$200,000 to the farmers' market nutrition program for WIC and Senior recipients to purchase CT Grown food
- \$200,000 to for GusNIP SNAP Doubling at farm stands and markets
- \$250,000 for CT Grown for CT Kids farm to school programming



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- \$200,000 for the Full Shelves pantry program

For FY22, the Department was appropriated \$250,000 from ARPA funds to establish the CT Grown for CT Kids Grant program. In its initial year, the program received 59 applications, totaling nearly \$1 million in requested funds across CT public schools, early childhood education centers, non-profits, and small businesses partnering with schools, farmers, and boards of education. Through a combination of financial and technical assistance, this grant program allows the Department to help develop farm-to-school programs that will increase the availability of local foods in children nutrition programs, allow educators to use hands-on educational techniques to teach students about nutrition and farm-to-school connections, and sustain relationships with local farmers. We recently announced thirteen awards and will be opening the second round of applications in the coming months.

Over the course of the last two years, the Department has executed multiple high-profile, animal seizures, including animals such as goats, horses, and dogs. These seizures were conducted in coordination with state and local law enforcement, the Attorney General's office, our State Animal Control Unit, and many of our Agriculture Marketing & Inspection Representatives. I want to note a special thank you to those agencies and our employees for their past and current efforts in these matters. Most of these animals, are housed and cared for at our Second Chance Rescue Barn, located at the York Correctional Institution in Niantic, CT and others have been adopted out to private citizens or animal rescue organizations. Once we obtain animals, we are then responsible for the health and welfare; including feed, bedding, veterinarian care, transportation, and staff time. We have the opportunity to, and seek, recovery for the costs, but it is well after we have incurred the costs of the care.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, I am happy to answer any questions.